Disability Inclusion

DISABILITY AND HEALTH

DECEMBER 18, 2024

CDC's website is being modified to comply with President Trump's Executive Orders.

Frequent Mental Distress Among Adults with Disabilities: An Easy-Read Summary

ABOUT

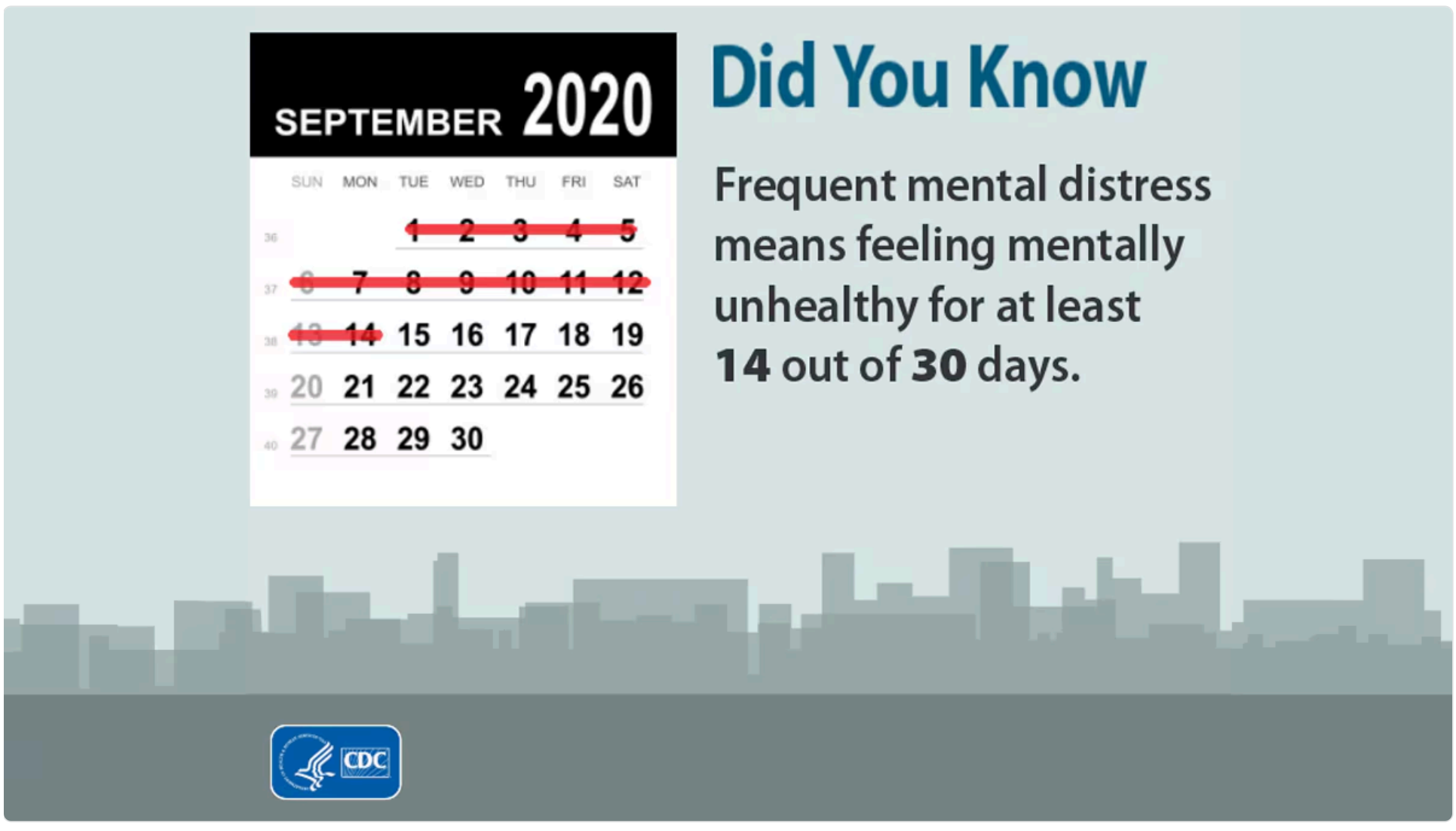
This is an Easy-Read Summary of the following report: Cree RA, Okoro CA, Zack MM, Carbone E (2020). Frequent Mental Distress Among Adults by Disability Status, Disability Type, and Selected Characteristics—United States 2018. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR).*

1. What is the CDC?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal public health agency. CDC responds to urgent health concerns.

2. What is frequent mental distress?

Anyone can have mental distress. Mental distress happens when a person feels stressed, sad or depressed, or has problems with their emotions. Adults with mental distress have difficulty in the way they think, feel, or behave. Someone can have **frequent mental distress** when they feel emotionally unhealthy, or very sad, anxious, or troubled, for at least **14 out of 30 days**. This distress can hurt a person's relationships, their work, and other parts of their life.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Did You Know
Frequent mental distress
means feeling mentally
unhealthy for at least
14 out of 30 days.
CDC

Frequent mental distress means feeling mentally unhealthy for at least 14 out of 30 days.

Adults with frequent mental distress are more likely than adults without frequent mental distress to:

- Have unhealthy behaviors such as smoking or not sleeping enough.
- Have chronic (long-lasting) health conditions like heart disease or diabetes.
- Visit the doctor more.

Adults with disabilities can also have frequent mental distress. Studies have found that adults with disabilities are more likely to have other health concerns related to frequent mental distress than adults without disabilities, such as:

Image of graphic

Other health concerns related to frequent mental distress are more common for adults with disabilities. [1]

3. How does CDC study frequent mental distress?

CDC collects information about how many adults in the United States have frequent mental distress by asking questions with a survey. This survey is called the **Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)**. This is a telephone survey that has questions about different health issues.

- BRFSS is the largest survey system in the world. More than 400,000 adults in the United States answer the BRFSS questions each year. [2]
- BRFSS collects information on how many people in the United States have disabilities and how many feel mental distress, as well as other health topics.
- CDC uses BRFSS to understand how many adults with disabilities have frequent mental distress compared to adults without disabilities.

BRFSS is a survey that collects information about how frequent mental distress affects adults with disabilities.

4. Where did the information for the Easy-Read Summary come from?

The information for this summary:

- Comes from the BRFSS telephone survey done in 2018.
- Includes information from 430,949 adults who answered questions about their disability status and frequent mental distress.
- Includes adults who are at least 18 years old and who do not live in an institution. Institutions include places such as prisons, nursing homes, and long-term care centers.

BRFSS includes questions to find out if the adult has a disability. Adults are identified as having a disability if they report having one or more of the six disability types shown below:

- Mobility:
  - Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.
- Cognition:
  - Serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- Independent living:
  - Difficulty doing errands alone.
- Hearing:
  - Deafness or serious difficulty hearing.
- Vision:
  - Blindness or serious difficulty seeing.
- Self-care:
  - Difficulty dressing or bathing.

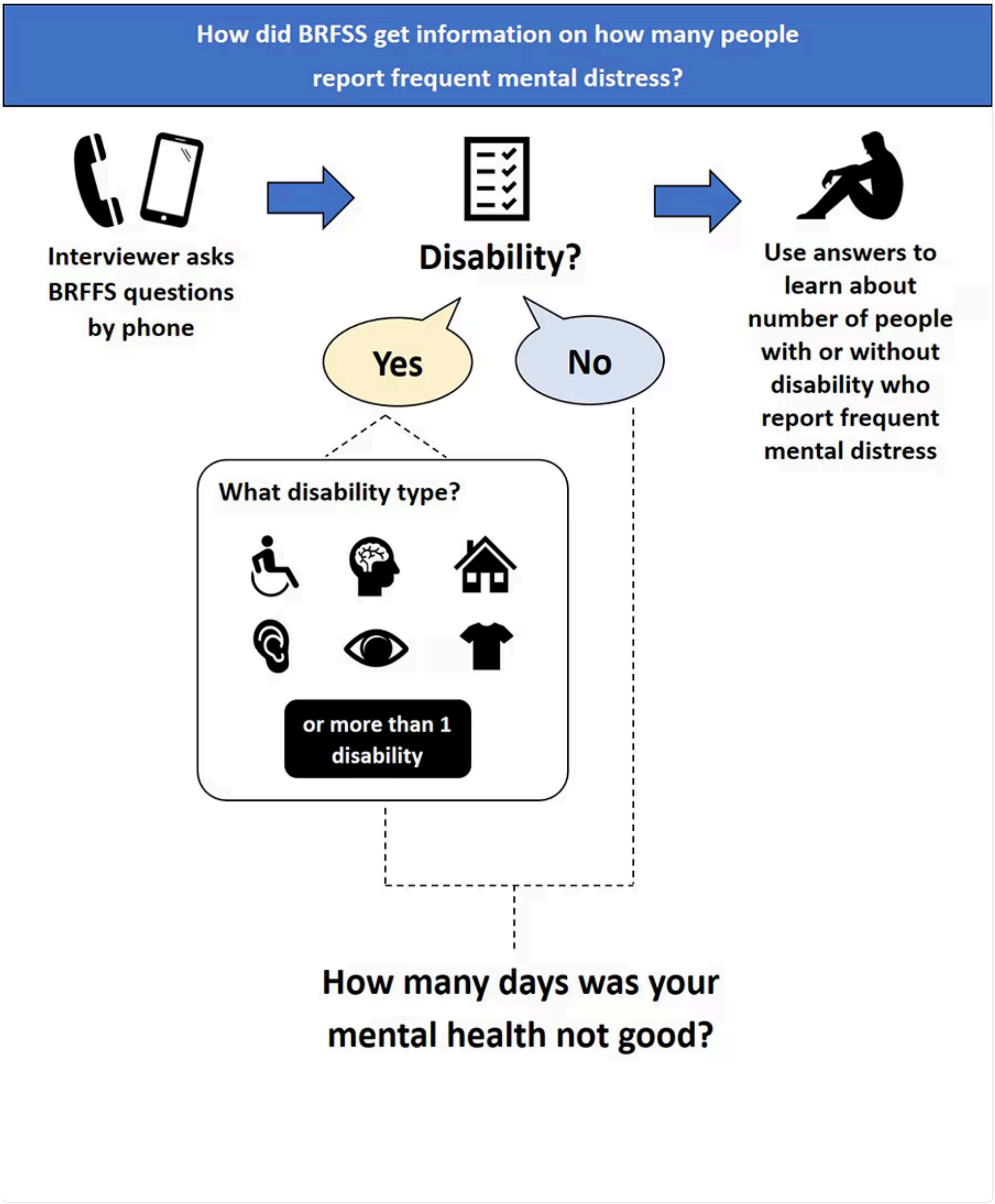
BRFSS includes a question to find out if the adult has mental distress.

Asking about mental wellness

"Thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?"

- Adults were identified as having **frequent mental distress** if they reported having poor mental health for **14 or more days** out of 30 days.

Frequent mental distress is when poor mental health has occurred for 14 or more days out of 30 days.


How did BRFSS get information on how many people report frequent mental distress?
Interviewer asks BRFFS questions by phone
Disability?
Yes
No
What disability type?
or more than 1 disability
Use answers to learn about number of people with or without disability who report frequent mental distress
How many days was your mental health not good?

BRFSS is a telephone survey that collects information about mental wellness for adults with disabilities.

5. What did this study find?

Adults with disabilities are five times more likely to report mental distress.

- More than half of adults with both a cognitive and mobility disability reported frequent mental distress.
- Adults with disabilities reported **more frequent mental distress** if they indicated having:
  - An unhealthy behavior or condition.
    OR
  - A health care need that was not met because of cost.

Unhealthy Behaviors

Unhealthy behaviors or conditions include cigarette smoking, not enough physical activity, fewer than 7 hours sleep each night, obesity, and depressive disorders.

6. Why are these findings important?

Frequent mental distress affects separate groups of people differently.

- Anyone can have frequent mental distress. CDC is learning how to help people who feel mentally or emotionally unhealthy.
- CDC wants to understand how frequent mental distress affects different groups of people.
- CDC also seeks to improve ways to support the inclusion of adults with disabilities in public health programs that support mental and emotional health.

7. What could help lower mental distress among adults with disabilities?

Public health professionals, policymakers, and healthcare providers can work with communities to help lower frequent mental distress among adults with disabilities.

CDC helps people feel connected in their communities.

They can do this by:

- Helping people feel connected and included in their community.
- Promoting the importance of mental health screenings and care.
- Increasing access, especially among people with cognitive disabilities, to:
  - Health promotion programs.
  - Mental health screenings.
  - Clinical care.
  - Support services.

What the words mean: Glossary

Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual telephone survey that noninstitutionalized U.S. adults aged 18 years or older answer.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal public health agency that responds to urgent health concerns in the United States.

Depressive Disorder includes depression, major depression, dysthymia, and minor depression.

Frequent Mental Distress is a combination of unhealthy feelings that can affect a person's relationships, their work, and other parts of their life. Someone experiencing mental distress has these mixed feelings for 14 or more days out of 30 days.

Survey is a way to ask a lot of people the same questions.

Note

It is important to remember that people responded to the questions in this study based on how they felt at one point in time. More studies could help us learn more about how frequent mental distress affects people throughout their lives.

Development

This Easy-Read Summary was developed using the Learning More about Health of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) as a guide:

Administration for Community Living (2019*). Learning More about Health of People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD): An Easy Read Summary*.

Citations

National Centers on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (2020). Mental Distress Among Adults with disabilities: An Easy-Read Summary. Available at: CDC MMWR WEB PAGE https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/index2020.html

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

REFERENCES

1. Okoro CA, McKnight-Eily LR, Strine TW, Crews JE, Holt JB, Balluz LS. State and Local Area Estimates of Depression and Anxiety Among Adults with Disabilities in 2006. Disability & Health Journal. 2011;4(2):78-90.
2. BRFSS. https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/about/index.html

SOURCES

- National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention